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Sc No. 08360/68

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
3 May 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Paris Initiative and the Possibility of a New Communist Military Offensive

1. The timing of Hanoi's move to break the deadlock on selection of a site for talks with the US may well be related to Vietnamese Communist preparations--apparently nearing completion--to launch major offensive military actions. The North Vietnamese may hope to push political developments in the war along to the point where they can be most directly orchestrated with Communist military plans in South Vietnam. There have been numerous indications that the Communists are gearing up for another major offensive, most likely in the months of May or June. Hanoi may have feared that if the deadlock over the site of talks persisted much longer, the political impact of any new military push would have been largely lost. In view of its decision some months ago to move to a "fight-talk" stage of the war, Hanoi would probably wish to prevent such a development if possible.

2. At the time of their 3 April offer of "contacts" with the US, the North Vietnamese may have anticipated fairly rapid progress toward a full bombing halt and the initiation of formal talks on a settlement of the war. Communist military activities in April may have been specifically tailored to the prospective diplomatic dialogue. The drop in major enemy military initiatives in early April may have been intended in part to improve the atmosphere for preliminary contacts with the US designed to obtain a

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full bombing cessation. Meanwhile, the Communists used the lull to prepare for large-scale offensive operations by early May, when Hanoi may have expected substantive discussions to be under way. Indeed the Communists may have expected the US response to a negotiating offer to be rapid and thus keep their military and diplomatic timetables synchronized. This could account for their quite precipitous addition of Warsaw to Phnom Penh, once the US had rejected the latter.

3. Heavy North Vietnamese infiltration and logistics operations in support of Communist forces in South Vietnam accelerated in April. Major Communist military units in several parts of the south continued the disengagements they had started in late March. Some units withdrew from their usual areas of tactical operations in order to resupply and to be reinforced. The heavy flow of infiltrators from North Vietnam doubtless is being used to beef up existing units and to help form new ones. The entire effort probably was carried on with a view toward applying heavy military pressures during a period of negotiations.

4. The question of exact timing in kicking off any new offensive is still highly conjectural, even if the Communists are attempting to tie it in with political developments. A number of reports

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have said that major attacks would be launched between late April and early May. Other reports, however, have said such attacks would occur between early May and 19 May; still others have mentioned later dates. There are indications in some areas--especially Saigon and I Corps--that attacks may well be imminent, although their timing and scope may be upset by allied operations.

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5. In sum, the evidence suggests that attacks could come at any time but we are unable to state with confidence whether they will occur before 10 May. Hanoi could be planning to launch major military actions in South Vietnam just before or shortly after the opening of the Paris talks. We think it equally possible, however, that major Communist military initiatives in the South may be held back for a while in the hope that preliminary contacts will soon

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bring about a full bombing halt. Once this is accomplished, offensive actions could be geared to obtain a maximum impact in ensuing discussions on substantive war issues.

6. The latest report we have of the timing of Communist military operations in the Saigon area indicates that attacks on the city and nearby installations may be launched in the next few days.

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